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The engaging manager in development mode

Rosa Marvell, Dilys Robinson, Wendy Hirsh



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Engaging Manager Report Series

The Engaging Manager in Development Mode

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Institute for Employment Studies

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) began exploring the concept of employee engagement in 2002, initially working with 46 organisations to define 'engagement' (see definition below), then moving on to develop an engagement measure for use within employee attitude surveys, and a diagnostic tool to identify engagement drivers.

Engagement definition

Engagement is a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. The organisation must work to nurture, maintain and grow engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee.¹

Throughout our early research into employee engagement, we consistently found that the employee–line manager relationship was crucial, regardless of organisation, sector or employee group. The strength and consistency of the influence of the line manager on engagement levels led us to undertake our latest research, on 'The Engaging Manager'.² Our aim was to understand how 'engaging managers' – people who inspire and motivate their teams to perform well – behave in their dealings with people, especially their own teams. This research is described in the Appendix of this report.

¹ Robinson D, Perryman S, Hayday S (2004), *The Drivers of Employee Engagement*, Institute for Employment Studies, Report No. 408

² Robinson D, Hayday S (2009), *The Engaging Manager*, Institute for Employment Studies, Report No. 470

1.2 This report

The extensive material we collected during our Engaging Manager research is being used to create a series of short reports, exploring different aspects of the findings in more detail. This report focuses on how engaging managers facilitate the growth and development of their team members using the words of the managers and teams themselves, and also draws on previous research,³ by IES which looked at *'the behaviour of managers who are good at developing other people'*.

This earlier research on *Managers as Developers of Others* identified effective development support through the eyes of the employee as *'any discussions or activities which have been of significant value to you in developing your skills, experience or career'*. It found that development is formed through *'a concern and a genuine desire to see the employee do well... These relationships are usually characterised by frequent informal interaction, detailed discussion of work issues, and a relative lack of hierarchy'*.⁴

The managers in our Engaging Manager research saw developing other people as central to their role. From the narratives of the managers, their teams, and their senior managers, three key themes emerged in their role in development of others:

1. **Formal development**, which included aspects such as targets, regular and constructive feedback, extra courses, and evaluating performance. Having recognisable assessment outcomes allowed managers to relay new skills to their team members, and give them the experience for promotions and career developments.
2. **Day-to-day continuous development** in which engaging managers were consistently involved in frequent more personal and less formal interactions with team members. These day-to-day activities required managers to strike a tricky balance between being involved and fully integrated into their teams while giving employees enough space and autonomy to not feel micro-managed. Having good personal relationships, pushing team members to strive, and setting a good example were all cited as important.
3. **Developing high potentials and poor performers.** Engaging managers successfully and sustainably developed others through dealing well with both

³ Hirsh W, Silverman M, Tamkin P, Jackson C (2004), *Managers as Developers of Others*, Institute for Employment Studies, Report No. 407

⁴ Hirsh W, Silverman M, Tamkin P, Jackson C (2004a), *Managers as Developers of Others: Main findings of an IES research study*, Institute for Employment Studies, Paper MP35

high fliers and those with performance problems. High fliers were afforded special encouragement and opportunities to develop and achieve more, and had rich benefit from mentoring. For problematic areas and people, despite not finding the experience pleasant, engaging managers tackled problems speedily, made sure the problem was explained with clarity, and worked with the employees to find appropriate solutions.

This short report is structured around these three main themes. It draws on managers' and team members' own words, and uses their experiences to draw conclusions on good practice for developing others.

2 Formalised Development

Without fail, all of our engaging managers were intensely involved with the positive development of their teams, both at team and individual levels. This chapter draws together the words of the managers themselves, their employees and their own managers to present the frameworks they use for the formal aspects of development. Beginning with target setting, through close involvement, to robust evaluation, the 25 managers created sturdy and clear trajectories through which to develop their teams in enduring and sustainable ways.

Despite coming from very different backgrounds, the approaches of our managers shared strong similarities, and provide a basis from which to enact good practice.

2.1 Setting performance targets

The start of good development for all our engaging managers began with setting performance targets in a clear and organised way. The importance of beginning with goals was emphasised, as it not only provided a visualisation and plan of action, but also laid down the path to follow. The managers linked together three things – clearly defining endpoints, reviewing progress and assessing results – into a core process to both achieve goals and act as a structure within which to develop team members.

‘First of all getting an understanding of what they expect their job role to be. It’s a consistent approach again. We do four yearly reviews, so every 12 or 13 weeks we have a quarterly review. The targets are the same, and if you’re that far away from the targets we’ll build in a target to gradually get you there.’

‘So, with performance, what I’ve found is the first time you do a performance review with people, you’ve got to do it honestly and you’ve not got to be afraid to challenge behaviours. I don’t think you can jump into that because it can become very de-motivating. So, the first time you do it you’re setting down some ground rules and agreeing the way forward.’

‘I set people expectations; I sit down and do reviews with them regularly.’

'At the start of every year I will sit down with the people who work for me and set their objectives. Within those objectives there will be a performance rating. Formally, I review that mid-year and end of year.'

The link between a target and the paths to achieve it were recognised by team members, who spoke of how goals facilitated their progression at work.

'We have the performance reviews; they're sort of every three months. So we've got personal development targets, or plans if you like and targets.'

Performance and development were integrated through target-setting within the organisations. Starting with a solid framework allowed managers to motivate their teams, and formalised systems through which to analyse or rate performance were spoken about as not only forms of assessment but also ways in which to incentivise teams.

'Individually we talk about performance. As a Team we talk about performance. We have what we call Scores on the Doors, which means how much work is outstanding. If we cleared X amount by this amount, this is where we would be for other things. It is about having that conversation, having that awareness or where we are at, where we need to be and how we are going to get there that moves it on as a Team. Then that motivates other people. So-and-so will say so-and-so has got whatever rate per hour, and what are you going to do? We have a bit of banter. We have a little bit of inter-team competition.'

'They have KPIs, which is Key Performer Indicators, and they have targets to meet. And they receive a quarterly bonus, which is on those targets. So, that's normally what we work towards and we give feedback on the KPIs because, obviously, that's what the target's based on and that's what they get their bonus on.'

This methodical approach was valued by the senior managers, who recognised that starting with well-laid-out goals was the foundation of sustainable achievement.

'There's a whole raft of performance indicators: around 16 of them, reviewed monthly, eg milestone achievements on key projects. The team performs well because of the sustained development of the team, letting good people rise.'

Additionally, teams found this approach made their lives at work easier, there was no need for second guessing, and they were not left rootless or unsure.

'You really know where you are and what your goals are.'

Sometimes managers made targets and the path to them more fluid, and responded to the specific needs of team members, their strengths, weaknesses and interests.

'I offer opportunities in coaching, in mentoring. So where do you think you've got some weaknesses? Okay. And you need to understand how a supply chain manager works. Okay.'

Likewise, senior managers recognised the benefits of having a flexible approach to targets. With an individualised response, team members were valued and thought of on a personal level, which often reflected the needs of the organisation.

'It's a healthy mix between individual personal development goals and dynamic business goals, because usually the individual ones are fitting very much the business goals.'

'He has a very methodical and relaxed approach. He will set the parameters out to the individuals of what the minimums are that they are expected to achieve. I've seen him then bring coaching in and mentoring in so that the individuals can raise their game.'

Whether using a formalised scale of performance indicators, or responding to needs and journeys in an individualised way, senior managers spoke of the importance of goals to our engaging managers.

'He likes a very clear framework of expectations, whether he's delivering or asking to be delivered.'

'He has an inbuilt need to achieve so sets an example to others. He's very clear about targets and what's needed, and is focused on achieving these.'

2.2 Facilitating achievement: enhancing and involving opportunities, regular contact and clear, consistent communication

When fully engaged in development mode, our engaging managers operated under three broad formal schemas which allowed them to advance their teams and individual team members. These comprised: providing opportunities in many different ways for their team members to get more involved and enhance their skills; having as much regular contact as possible, and clearly communicating feedback and organisation change on a frequent and honest basis.

2.2.1 Providing opportunities to involve and enhance team members

Opportunities that engaging managers provided for their teams, and directed them towards, took several different forms. Broadly, this was split between in-work platforms and new experiences, external courses and educational development, and personally lending a guiding hand. Universally, it was one of the areas that was most appreciated by the teams, and was a core area of focus for group discussion. It allowed horizons to be broadened, weaknesses to be addressed, and made employees feel valued and respected.

Much of the time, work-based opportunities were spaces created by managers; for those employees that wanted a new challenge, the managers made a point of enabling and were never 'precious' about certain tasks or roles.

'It's a case of deputising, for me, taking on development objectives within the office, acting out of the office. So there are opportunities there if people want to do them, and they are not all work related, you know, do this bit of work.'

'We have a four-weekly get together so we have the quarterly review which says you're not where it needs to be, but history shows you're good enough to do it. You go through the coaching again. What training do you need in these areas? Is there anything you don't understand in these areas that need focusing? We give them four-weekly targets, but behaviour as well as specific result targets. And we try and build the result to get to the target, not just it needs to be 100% from next week.'

'People in the team are involved in high-profile projects, allowing them to be creative, which makes them happy. I've often deliberately engineered their involvement.'

Employees responded to these opportunities in a focused way. For them, the experiences and learning processes were intensely personal, and were referred to in terms of self-journeys.

'There is cross-departmental work, which does benefit the department, but it also benefits your personal development as well, I think, getting involved with other projects and other departments.'

'The outcome was I was to do different things this time round, given extra roles, extra responsibility, look at developing the weak area, which has of course led me into stuff'

'I think it's opportunities as well that you have within the company, not just within the department. There are opportunities to give your ideas, and there are different schemes that they offer, progressing ideas.'

Sometimes, the managers even stepped aside from their own roles in order for their team members to try new activities, and gain the experience they desired. This trust was reflected in very positive responses from their team members.

'He's very keen to get other people to stand in for him at meetings, and that gives you exposure to different teams, and different levels of management throughout the business.'

'Putting people in seats is what [our manager] does; giving them the training or whatever to do that job.'

Development programs were learning processes that some of the managers had experienced themselves.

'She's has been away on a coaching and bringing out the best in your team members course. That was a two-day course.'

'He's been on, what we call, the Gateway Programme, the Managers Gateway Programme, and that includes a number of different modules...how to manage your staff... staff coaching.'

'I've had quite a few training programs over the years. I can't remember them all now, there have been a lot. Certainly the basic ones like interviewing skills, coaching and mentoring skills, feedback techniques, appraisals, performance management, all that kind of stuff, delegation, project planning, all those ones.'

The skills learned and benefits experienced through these courses were reflected in the diffusion of such education from the managers to their teams, where the managers facilitated extra learning to enhance their employees' skills and knowledge. This often occurred on a personal level.

'I think, at present, I'm sponsoring two people I've got going through further education or higher education courses to develop themselves.'

Indeed, one senior manager drew a direct line between the training the manager received, and his willingness to develop his team members through similar ways.

'He will sponsor people for things like directors' commendation, and I think because of the way he, if you like, has been talent spotted, and cared for in many ways.'

The courses were highly valued by team members and they felt real impact on their day-to-day work from the things they had learnt. Not only did it teach concrete skills, but also the general enrichment of background knowledge and awareness of new approaches revitalised team members. Helping staff make contact with the courses further raised the confidence of staff members who

gained self-confidence to tackle new challenges they would previously have felt unable to. For those team members who found courses especially hard to access it was particularly valuable.

'The best course I've been on recently was the coaching course. It focuses more on a better way of getting the most out of people. That's what I'm going for, as far as I'm concerned. It'd be nice to have everybody on the course because it does open your eyes. It's not as intense as some of the ones you go on. It's more relaxed but it does help you to focus on the people side of the job more.'

'[Our manager has] encouraged us to take courses, exams etc. related to the job. It makes us more knowledgeable.'

'Coaching enables managers to enable their teams to improve their own performance.'

'I've been on classes - communication classes, safety classes, management classes, organisational classes...Life experience as well.'

'They realise that the more developed their colleagues are, the easier it is to run the department, so if your colleagues are amazing, then you've got to do less work. So that's what they try and do, they try and upskill us so we've got the skills we need.'

Lastly, engaging managers provided opportunities for development on a personal level, and often expressed this in terms of responsibility. For many of their team, this gave them greater credibility; managers did not merely signpost avenues for development, but approached it as an interactive process. Actions were not merely development for development's sake.

'When you make a commitment to try and develop someone the bigger commitment is with you as well as the colleague.'

'As long as they've got a track record behind them I think that's what we try and give them, but we encourage them to come and say what training do you need every 12 weeks? You tell me what you want to do? What do you want to choose? What are your next steps? What do you want out of it? Where do you see yourself in a year, two years?'

Lending a careful guiding hand was greatly appreciated by the manager's teams, they felt attentively responded to, and were grateful to have constructive and sensitive direction. Although in practice the actions taken may be individual to each organisation or team, the thoughtful and targeted approach was the key. Additional to the trust that was fostered between manager and employee, these actions also inspired self-motivated development from the staff themselves, and for some, bolstered collaboration and cross-team developmental support.

'I just happened to mention to her that I wanted to improve on some of my communications, and she told me about one of the books that she read... so she didn't say, go out and buy it, and read it, she just said, oh, I must admit that this helped me once. I went and bought the book and it's fabulous, and some of the things in there are my total mantra now so it has helped.'

'I wasn't very good at giving presentations or speaking in front of people. So, he made sure that I had to do that as much as possible, but in a supportive way. And he gave me a lot of training and support to make sure that I could do it and then I was better at doing it. And now I don't have a problem with it at all. So, it really worked in terms of identifying my weaknesses and helping me.'

'He instils confidence...he delegates jobs, he doesn't micro-manage, he expects people to come back if they're stuck...he has included me in activities, groups etc., that might not be perceived as appropriate for my level.'

'There is a natural tendency towards it and it's about coaching and bringing on the ones who are the ones at the back of the pace, if you like. So there's quite a bit of encouraging the likes of us to lead by example and others to be coaching the ones that have fallen back.'

2.2.2 Sustaining regular contact as much as possible

Valued by engaging managers, their staff and their senior managers alike, regular contact is very important when facilitating the development of others. The managers made a concerted effort to plan such contact, and did not take for granted that the free time would be available without preparation in advance. These periods allowed the manager to review the progress of their teams, ensured there was a space in which problems could be discussed and redressed, and sustained relationships. Without fail the managers placed great emphasis on the need to plan ahead for these regular meetings, as it allowed them to be aware of any issues sooner rather than later, and allowed them to always be involved with fixing problems at the earliest possible opportunity.

'The way which I'm trying it now with the two people who report immediately to me is to spend...at least every month try and have a formal hour of discussion just reviewing what's gone right and what's gone wrong.'

'I put in my diary every fortnight all the people that I manage individually. I speak to them at least - my PA, I speak to every day - but the other guys, I speak to at least once a fortnight for an extended period of time, just one to one and just about them and the work they're doing and what's going on. Not that I can interfere particularly, but just so that I understand what they're doing and so I can give a bit of a steer or give them a bit of coaching if they need some coaching; help them if they want some help and support, and that's what they're after.'

'Every week I have a one-to-one session with people who work for me. And it's half an hour, it's the opportunity to talk things over with people. I say to people it's your time with me. But, to be honest, it's not just that; it's me getting to talk to them.'

'Having that regular, constant, personal one-to-one review with them about what's going right and what's not going right. And not fixing it for them, getting them to fix it.'

Team members recognised the benefit of these meetings, particularly the ways in which they brought to light areas for improvement that would have otherwise lain undetected. For some employees, they viewed the careful scheduling of reviews as integral to the success of their teams. For others, development processes such as mentoring arose out of such meetings.

'She's helped us by having us sit down in these one-to-ones, and it's team talks. She's made us realise what action we need to take, and obviously [it] is making us improve performance.'

'We do regular monthly briefs. We have a daily meeting. We have a weekly meeting. We have three-monthly reviews with myself and the five shift team leaders which Manager 2 assisted in setting up in the first place. He normally comes in. We have a whole day session once every three months.'

'There's a lot of sitting down, explaining direction, defining roles and responsibilities, focusing on me as an individual...I've been given a mentor. He encourages us to share what we're good at.'

The senior managers recognised not only that it allowed managers to stay up to date with developments within their team, but also that it often helped team members to participate more fully, as a result of being listened to, and of having clear direction and management.

'It's a very close relationship. He has acquired competences through managing different groups and sizes of team. It's been a structured development.'

'He spends time on a 1:1 basis with the members of his team. He gathers the team regularly to discuss work and invite people to contribute. His team results are always good.'

2.2.3 Continually communicate feedback and organisational change

The final aspect of formal development management during the transition from targets to evaluation is the necessity to sustain clarity of communication from

managers to employees. All the managers recognised that it was essential to bring a longitudinal aspect to such communication, in order to continually develop their teams. Furthermore, as with having planned contact, communicating on a frequent basis meant that problem areas could be tackled head on, and were unlikely to persist undetected. It also allowed any development to become personalised to the individual needs of each team member, as well as making sure that wider organisation 'sea changes' were not obscured from employees.

'Through regular one to ones and coaching and observations and feedback, that's where I highlight any gaps and identify, okay, you're not performing in this area, so what are you going to do. So, I'm very specific in the targets that I set, but I'm also specific in the fact that if they have got a development area, that I do what I need to do to address that.'

'There's no point in reviewing [objectives] twice a year at the performance review. It's got to almost be their life; their working life is about those metrics.'

'At the morning huddle it's the managers but in the two afternoon ones any colleague that's on the shop floor comes in, so that's where we do our engaging...We'll have about 30-40 colleagues standing there and we'll talk to them about what's on the agenda for the day.'

'It's about communicating. From that we give them the information from the previous day, or week and where we're going today, and tomorrow, and the rest of the week.'

From the team perspective, the clarity that evolved from this communication meant they were able to continue their work with purpose, and were constantly reminded of the overall, holistic goals of their labour. The social bonding accrued throughout such interaction was also highlighted by certain employees, and several teams mentioned the developmental benefit of being encouraged to participate in meetings. Despite finding it challenging, this gentle nudging by managers lent much confidence to their teams.

'Going into a meeting with [our manager], you come out knowing exactly what you want to do, and even if it's just an action plan. She's got a way of communicating it, and getting you motivated, so then we all go out and we just know exactly what we want to do, and what we want to achieve that day.'

'There's a good team ethic, and we're focused on having regular briefings to share experiences and practices within the group. We also have a number of communication sessions where we look at what the business is doing, whether the environment is changing, what are the challenges, and trying to bring that all together.'

'He strongly encourages all members of the team to participate in the business reviews.'

'Think he's also very keen to get all the individuals in the team to stand up and speak at the communication sessions, and you can see a lot of people, sort of squirming. You can understand why he's trying to do it, to further develop the individuals.'

'Every time we have meetings, every day, management are pushing you to, you're telling yourselves, telling you this, that we all want to do well, because we're here in the store, we want to do well. They don't really want people coming in, saying, oh, I'm going to work today, I don't really care if we get a bonus.'

Some senior managers also highlighted how continual interaction fostered trust, as managers who persistently communicated with their staff inspired confidence, and so staff placed confidence in the fact that although an answer may not be provided straight away, neither would it be left to fall by the wayside. This was indicative of some of the best practice.

'He's very good at checking back re: his intentions. He's good at promoting positive feedback, up and down.'

Previous research:

The continuous and gradual nature of good developmental relationship building had also emerged through our previous investigation into *Managers as Developers of Others*. It was approached as very much an active preoccupation, and was found to increase team members' confidence and motivation. As in the more recent study, earlier research emphasised the tailoring of the development relationship to the individual and their current work circumstances.⁵

2.3 Evaluating performance

Any goals set must be robustly evaluated for worthwhile development to take place. A common theme from the engaging managers running through this

⁵ Hirsh W, Silverman M, Tamkin P, Jackson C (2004a), *Managers as Developers of Others: Main findings of an IES research study*, Institute for Employment Studies, Paper MP35, p.8

process is that of continual appraisal, rather than waiting until six-monthly or yearly reviews. Having strong analysis of finished projects, and of day-to-day labour, gives a strong foundation on which to build further development, and also gives a point to which comparison can be made. Across the organisations, assessment and re-assessment was used as a core activity in working life by the engaging managers. This was used to set the direction of development for team members, and crucially not just what was to be done was clear, but also the reasons for it. These same features were seen across different organisations; despite often widely varying approaches to performance assessment – from set-in-stone forms of assessment, to more fluid conversations.

‘Obviously, the way we’ve got it set up in terms of objective setting, performance reviews, happens on a yearly basis anyway, so you do get to give your input to someone on what you think their performance is, but on a particular issue during the week or just to keep the team generally motivated and performance levels up, I will make sure I’m speaking to people, praising them when they do a good job, finding out what their problems are, helping them with whatever needs to be done, rather than just coming to the end of a six-month review and saying, well, you’ve not delivered that.’

‘It’s done through a fairly systematic process - 1:1s, team meetings, appraisals. It regards an individual’s capabilities and grading. Every six months there are appraisal objectives. I take account of individuals - some get the job done by themselves, others need constant visits. I recognise individual differences.’

‘We have done some team diagnostics...Quality control has improved - people understand what’s acceptable and what’s not.’

‘As part of those one-to-one meetings I described we go through people’s work programmes, we go through progress, we identify any issues if we’ve got any, and I kind of do the monitoring and the performance management in quite a light hearted way. I don’t sit there with sheets of paper.’

Team members found this evaluation enormously encouraging, as it provided them with a concrete platform from which to build from. Further of value to employees was the ways in which assessment was disaggregated from team to individual. The quick response, honesty, and consistency and calibre of feedback were most valued by staff.

‘She was really effective in doing that, and in the follow up as well each week, have you done anything with that? Have you moved forward with that? So it was just a case of obviously, good skills, good questioning, good follow-up, and it was continued, it wasn’t stopped. She was always saying, what we’ll do next time, and then reviewing it and then going back, seeing how you were getting on as well.’

'She keeps us informed all the time how well we're all doing separately and then as a team together. All the time, each week she says, we're doing well or we're not doing well or what we need to do to improve. And then she talks to us as a team as well.'

'...over the last couple of years, especially since [our manager] has been more involved in the day-to-day running of the operation, we're certainly getting a lot more good feedback, a lot of encouragement.'

'You don't have to wait until the end of that year to be told what your failings are or what your good points are.'

'She does virtually a daily bulletin and the headings are all the targets and what have you, and the results...So in many ways she's doing an excellent job over there, in feeding back.'

Senior managers also recognised the importance of making sure evaluation was relevant and that realistic changes could arise out of it. It was not enough to provide criticism or suggestions without ensuring that the requisite materials are provided. It is this aspect of developing others that made engaging managers stand out, and made employees react positively to feedback.

'There are informal reviews and she will ensure that, before anything is done with regards to someone's performance, they've got the tools and the skills to be able to do the job.'

Previous research:

Our previous research suggested similar findings, and this highlights the importance making sure that to some degree, development of others is targeted. Clarity of analysis of development needs emerged as important, as was recurrent and useful review and feedback. Observing, and providing solutions that could be implemented was the central function of formal development. As with the current research, managers who develop others well do not stop at the diagnosis stage or even feedback, but ensure that there is a really well understood and practical agreement about how learning will be facilitated.⁶

⁶ Hirsh W, Silverman M, Tamkin P, Jackson C (2004a), *Managers as Developers of Others: Main findings of an IES research study*, Institute for Employment Studies, Paper MP35, p.3
Hirsch W, Silverman M, Tamkin P, Jackson C (2004), *Managers as Developers of Others*, Institute for Employment Studies, Report 407, p.6

3 Day-to-Day Continuous Development

Whilst formalised processes can be very useful for engaging managers in the development of others, more personal, subjective and fluid approaches are often just as important. These operate on a daily basis, often at the level of the individual, stemming from personal knowledge and strong relationships. Developing others in an engaging way is at its most successful when it is considered and practised as a constant process, and when the small things are not pushed to one side. Such daily interplays fall under three broad themes:

- Firstly, being involved, yet not micro-managing and being flexible.
- Secondly, giving praise when due and knowing team members on a personal level.
- Lastly, the desires of team members and senior managers: being challenged and setting an example.

3.1 Balancing close involvement with *laissez-faire*

Balancing being involved enough but not suffocating teams by micro-management is a skill well practised by engaging managers. A manager who rolls up his or her sleeves and participates along with the team, whilst remaining aware of changes and fluctuations within the organisation at many levels, is welcomed by the team as one who creates an environment in which they can thrive.

3.1.1 Staying involved

One of the key points raised by managers was their effort to exhibit behaviour that would encourage teams to participate more fully in life at work. Engaging managers ensure they stay aware of what is going on and keep constant lines of discussion open. Just as importantly, this was shared with their employees, and played a strong part in setting the pace and direction of development. Involved

behaviours were exhibited through practices of influencing, integrating, coaching and deploying.

'Very much discussion, very much gathering information, gathering the ideas, looking at how realistic those sorts of ideas are going to be, throwing out a few scenarios and a few what ifs with people and generally encouraging people to set their own targets and their own objectives.'

'I've very much gone about that through the information boards, through the team briefings, through the regular morning meetings that we have, directing and controlling...Getting the team leaders on board, using continuous improvement.'

'I attend every induction, so every new starter's induction I go in and give them anything from 15 minutes to half hour...I tell them about what's important to the business, and why they're here, and what they will add to our team.'

For some managers, this approach was born of experience in which they had been on the receiving end of unsuccessful approaches, especially managers who seemed quite remote from their work most of the time.

'Personally, I've been in that position before where I've had a manager who didn't pay too much attention to what I did and then you'd sit down on an annual basis and you'd think, well, why the heck did you not talk to me about this before. I've not seen it, if you've seen it you must come and tell me and we could have done something about it. I think it's very much about continual type development of people rather than a disjointed annual type approach.'

Involvement of the manager was welcomed by their teams, who recognised that they were thought of as important, which in turn removed potentially negative feelings of unequal treatment. Whilst much of the time this was reflected in general expressions of having experienced fair treatment and understanding what was going on in the company as a whole, in some cases employees were even more explicit.

'I think the main starting point for that was her being visible to, not just all the staff but all the staff in all their places, which is from the top of Aberdeen, or Inverness, right the way down to Penzance. She made sure that she'd seen all the teams, and therefore they all are equal.'

The impact that involvement had on teams as a whole was observed by senior managers, and this behaviour ensures not only engagement but also higher performance and autonomous development of team members.

'There is no distance between them and their teams, which leads to higher motivation and very high energy levels.'

'She is very thorough and with anybody who works for her she is very good at explaining how it needs to be done, what is the right way to do it.'

'He's very good at involving his staff in decision-making. He's very good at supporting them in their own development, and their interests, and by trying to find reasonable and creative solutions to their issues.'

'They love that he's prepared to work with them and come out of his comfort zone.'

3.1.2 Laissez-faire

However, it was important for involvement not to slide into micro-management, something which was abhorred by team members without exception. Whilst having a hands-on manager was certainly welcomed, when it constrained team members from carrying out their jobs, advancing skills or curtailing their professional and personal development, employees expressed great frustration. Being able to combine the two processes of giving team members space to grow whilst not leaving staff unsupported was not an intrinsic quality of engaging managers, but something that they had to learn to do over time.

'I've really worked on it, but in the early days, I used to pretty much be in a tell mode, and now I feel that I've switched to a coaching mode now, so I'm not just telling them what to do, I'm coaching them and encouraging them to think for themselves...that's the challenge sometimes for me to stop, and think, stop what I'm doing and let's get them to come up with the idea themselves.'

Teams embraced the opportunity of self-determined development combined with drawing on the experience of their managers. They also recognised the honesty that was inherent in the openness of their managers.

'He's quite good at listening and giving encouragement and then, to a degree, I think he lets us get on with doing the job. He's there when you need him, which is good. But on the other hand, he's not standing over you all the time dictating what needs to happen. There is a presence.'

'He gives a steer. If you need help he gives it; otherwise, he trusts you to get on with it. I feel he trusts me. He's very perceptive if I'm having a rocky time or I'm in the firing line. The support is there.'

'Whatever the conclusion, [our manager] would back you up and support you. It's confidence-building. He says, "Whatever decision you make, I'll stand by you as long as you can tell me your thought processes".'

'He trusts staff to do their job, and will step in if necessary.'

'When I've seen [our managers] talking to staff, as far as I'm aware she has given them the information that she's got available. You know, it's sharing as much knowledge as she has. Nobody is naïve enough not to think there will always be some elements she might not be able to share with people at that point in time, but certainly that has impressed me, her openness and honesty.'

'I think he's passed on his knowledge, as well, to me. So, he doesn't keep to himself and say, you find out the hard way. He helps you. He doesn't insist on you doing it his way, but he does pass on his knowledge, so that helps.'

The impact of this willingness to empower others was clearly visible to senior managers, who recognised the skill in careful delegation, and observed the benefits it brought to team members.

'[They are] excellent in delegating work accountability and responsibility. It's all of that so that means [their] people are in charge to do it but how they do it is mainly down to them and just gives them the feeling of being empowered to do what they have to do.'

Previous research:

Our previous research found that this approach to developing your employees produced tangible effects that were welcomed by team members, particularly in the sense of a relative lack of hierarchy. The balance between managers being proactive and persistent, but still allowing teams space for control and self-determination was indicative of a very good developmental relationship. Those managers who delivered good developmental behaviour had made a shift from the 'controller' to more of gentle coaching.⁷

3.1.3 Flexibility

The key means by which engaged managers negotiated the tricky balance between good involvement and letting their employees take control was by remaining flexible and responsive about work. It was seen as a managerial duty to communicate and help teams to have new responsibilities, by making space for them to do so in a controlled environment, and not to be a 'blocker'.

⁷ Hirsh W, Silverman M, Tamkin P, Jackson C (2004a), *Managers as Developers of Others: Main findings of an IES research study*, Institute for Employment Studies, Paper MP35, pp. 3, 10
Hirsh W, Silverman M, Tamkin P, Jackson C (2004), *Managers as Developers of Others*, Institute for Employment Studies, Report No. 407, p.2

'What we tend to do [as managers] is we would try and give [team members] bits that we would normally do just to try and stimulate them a little bit more and give them a bit more responsibility so that it makes them feel like they have got somewhere else to go...we try and drip feed bits of our work into theirs.'

'It is about tweaking...encouraging a team and developing a team.'

Teams greatly appreciated the way this gave them the freedom to develop their own ideas within broad parameters, and likewise senior managers recognised how having such flexibility brought a variety of new opportunities and new tasks into play for employees, and spurred staff to take initiatives themselves.

'He talks about where they were yesterday, and he encourages them to come up with ideas of how they can improve. He's looked at the work they do. He's looked at the work mix that goes through the team, and over a five-day period he does mix the work up so they do a bit of everything.'

'Another thing he's very good at is mixing up the work of the team, so people get job enrichment, I guess, by doing different things.'

'He challenges them, and he doesn't just take a black on white objective to challenge, he challenges them in different ways. So, he gets more out of individuals on an individual basis which then allows the team to be better, and I think what happens if one of the team is struggling either because they're overloaded with work or it's a different situation that's harming them, then he will get others to rally round and help.'

3.2 Personal interactions

There were several behaviours that were commented on frequently throughout interviews with managers, teams and senior managers alike which assisted in sustaining a positive environment for development. Importantly, this cannot be reduced to merely 'soft and cuddly' conduct, and is instead a crucial way of setting a developmental tone in the team. This meant that teams mentioned feeling valued, knowing their hard work had been recognised, experienced heightened morale, felt motivated to achieve targets and appreciated being acknowledged as individuals with their own passions and interests.

3.2.1 Giving praise when due

Praise and recognition after work well done was a seminal interaction between engaging managers and staff, and spurred energy for development. Managers saw the importance in gratitude and rewards, emphasising that it instilled belief amongst their teams, and should be done even if a taboo exists around public commendation.

'I'm not frightened to stand up in a communication and say, there's people within this room who are getting rewarded for performance, which sends shudders down some people's spines, but I'm a big believer that people should understand that we're doing that, where it's always been a bit secret squirrel...but I will be overt in letting people know that generally performance will be rewarded.'

Staff expressed a direct impact of this behaviour on day-to-day work life, and the most frequent result is that they felt more energised and conducive to striving harder. It helped team members see their managers as conscientious and equitable individuals.

'I think that it's the raising of the staff morale, and people wanting to work for her that might have had more of a direct impact.'

'He does feed back and congratulate us when we achieve those targets...So, I think he does motivate us and there's lots of ways you can motivate people.'

'She's also very good at publicly praising people through the Intranet, and saying, look how well x did in getting his policy agreed, or such and such a body has done. Or we've got these celebration days, and things like that, and having individuals' names up in lights, and again, regardless of the grade, but down to what job they're doing.'

The same value was also observed by senior managers, who further highlighted that it does not need to be in the form of grandiose gestures, but can simply be in the form of honest appreciation.

'I think personally going that extra mile to reward - and I don't mean money - I mean just a thank you note, a letter, a phone call or a message; I think that builds a huge emotional bank account with people.'

'He's very much a thank you type manager. I don't think there's anybody that wouldn't appreciate that.'

3.2.2 Getting to know teams one-to-one

Having good personal relationships between staff and managers was closely aligned with praising teams as important in creating a positive climate in which to develop staff. Great significance was placed on individualising communication and rapport with each team member, in order to have people motivated for the right reasons and ensure the progress that is right for them. Again and again, managers saw the link between finding out the personal passions of their staff, and how this fed into their effectiveness at work. It was essential that each team member was treated as a distinctive person.

'It's about understanding strengths, spending time with people to understand strengths.'

'I just try and find common ground with people. Once you build a rapport with them you can start to understand what makes them tick. What I have found is that pride often makes people tick. And not being listened to makes people tick.'

'[If you think] "I know every situation", then you are sadly mistaken, and that's potentially your downfall. You have to remember that you are dealing with people and their emotions, and trying to work out what makes them tick, what's that thing in them that makes them tick, and no two people are completely the same.'

They further highlighted that this was a learning process, and that time had to be spent getting to know staff.

'If people are new, people have got different learning styles, so, I think you've got to appreciate that not everybody learns the same. To find out which is the best way for them to learn; some people take longer than others. Just to be patient and be supportive.'

'We'll just sit and talk about family life, home life...I find that in turn I get to know what makes them tick and what motivates them. For example, I know that one of my managers needs constant praise and recognition and I've got that from talking to him and spending some time with him.'

However, a word of warning: this was never at any point expressed by managers as a dilution of professionalism. Whilst rapport had to be sustained, and managing through relationships was agreed by all to be more effective and better practice than through top-down aggression, authority had to be maintained.

'I enjoy just talking to people and, I guess, building relationships with people. And you've got to be careful how you build and develop those relationships because you can't just be people's mate. You've got to be the boss at the same time.'

Being recognised as individuals brought pleasure to team members, both through being differentiated, and through the motivating success it brought to the team holistically. Building up bonds and a strong rapport required the ability and willingness to listen and react to people, but allowed managers to really play to individual strengths and weaknesses, and proceed in a reactive manner.

'It is about your manager getting to know you, and finding out what the motivational factors are, because if they can touch on your pulse of motivation then you do it.'

'You've got to teach or deal with every individual as they are; they're individuals, and accommodate your style to adjust to that person, but also be able to tailor whatever you teach them to their needs.'

'It's recognising the individual and not having just a standard approach to everyone.'

Previous research:

Our previous research corroborates these findings, as the same themes of positive development emerged before. Most crucially, warmth of relationships, positive encouragement and frequent informal interaction were elements that employees felt had fostered really sustainable and constructive development. Other behaviours that were appreciated by team members in relation to their development were reflective and collaborative: informing, advising, assessing, thinking, empowering. Really getting to know team members, especially understanding their personal drivers and interests was found to be key to a developmental relationship. It may seem obvious, but real, personal interest and attention is perhaps the strongest development gift any manager can give. In the earlier research this attention was found to be a huge motivator in performance long before any development action or upskilling took place. In particular it encouraged employees to take on greater challenges - one of the ways we measure 'employee engagement' in terms of '*going the extra mile*'.⁸

3.3 What team members and senior managers value

Two elements emerged out of focus groups with engaged teams and interviews with senior managers respectively. Despite not manifesting as strongly within the narratives of engaging managers – although certainly not absent – their huge pervasiveness makes considering them highly pertinent.

3.3.1 Team members wanting to be challenged

Time and again, employees value being challenged in a constructive way at work. It provides possibilities to take 'ownership and responsibility of one's own development journey' in a very much active way. It is beneficial for team members taking self-determination of development into their own hands, and they cherished times when they were compelled to work hard and go beyond their comfort zone.

⁸ Hirsh W, Silverman M, Tamkin P, Jackson C (2004a), *Managers as Developers of Others: Main findings of an IES research study*, Institute for Employment Studies, Paper MP35, p.3
Hirsh W, Silverman M, Tamkin P, Jackson C (2004), *Managers as Developers of Others*, Institute for Employment Studies, Report 407, p.3

'I think what she did really was that she was able to identify, because I don't see areas of improvement, I was saying, oh I can't say anything, but she was able to really tunnel down, from really good questioning on areas of improvement, and what I will do differently, what I'll learn from it, and how I reflected on that. It was sort of, for me it's challenging how I think about stuff, because I can be quite one-dimensional, very black and white, that's it. So I was able to just look at the bigger picture and say, well what do you do differently, and saying, how would that work for you? What do you think it would do? What would you take away from stuff? It was basically just utilising very, very effective questioning to stretch me really, further.'

'It made me think a bit harder in terms of all these different roles and responsibilities that I was doing...She said I could do it with my eyes closed, which is true. So I wasn't really trying to stretch myself, and that was what came out of the meetings.'

'She can identify my weak spots, and weak values, I think now we're bringing out the best in each other, sharing best practice, and she just wanted to see more.'

Previous research

This desire to be challenged was echoed in our previous research. Individuals often saw this as lacking in managers who did not develop their staff well. It was experienced as neglect, inaction and deliberate career blocking. These are sure-fire ways in which to disengage teams. The earlier research often linked challenge and stretch with the giving of developmental opportunities we discussed earlier.⁹

3.3.2 Setting a good example

From the other viewpoint, senior managers were well placed to see how engaging managers presented themselves, and to assess the value of setting a good example. Working hard, being focused and also remaining enthusiastic and positive about their role at work was a way in which managers could become good role models, and could motivate their team to stretch themselves. A key point was really getting 'stuck in' so as to encourage team members to do the same.

'He's someone who leads by example, rather than by theory.'

'A lot is down to him; he sets a very good example and pulls his weight, so others do.'

⁹ Hirsh W, Silverman M, Tamkin P, Jackson C (2004a), *Managers as Developers of Others: Main findings of an IES research study*, Institute for Employment Studies, Paper MP35, p.4

'He leads from the front, so you couldn't find a better role model in the energy activist sense.'

'He's extremely knowledgeable, very detailed; he understands the levers and the things that he needs to deliver, and then he sets about enacting them, basically, so he's a great example of where someone has a simple and clear objective in mind and goes about it in a very focussed and determined way to make that happen.'

4 Highs and Lows

Managing both team members that stand out from the crowd, and poor performers, are two areas of developing others that engaging managers deal with deftly. Their fairness and flexibility in both these areas is well recognised by their teams. By taking charge of these situations in an individualised way, managers are able to provide new experience to enhance the skills of high fliers by finding flexibility within their organisations and taking a personal approach. This same flexibility and attention lends itself to sensitive and immediate responses when performance dips below expectation, whether individually or for their team.

4.1 Bolstering high fliers

For high-octane team members, managers develop their potential through varying levels of attention. Broadly, the ways in which this was approached by our engaging managers focused on providing special opportunities and mentoring.

4.1.1 Special opportunities

This differed from smaller additional responsibilities and flexibilities, particularly in companies where there was not the organisational scope for formal progression. Special opportunities ranged from having less supervision or more autonomy, to giving presentations, and in some cases even to international trips abroad. Disregarding the resources available to them, engaging managers ensured that high-performing staff were recognised as so, and were pushed to continue achieving and growing. Many of these approaches also supported these team members not only in getting extra experience, but also having a higher chance of being noticed by others in the business. Often managers saw this as a duty, even if it meant that their high fliers may move on.

'I also allow them or make sure fairly early they are doing things like presentations and, in a number of circumstances, clearly being seen as a person who is leading on

a particular piece of work, so they have that profile, and help build their profile. So, I'm attempting to give them things to do and opportunities, whilst I can't give them full stuff, they are getting stuff done and also building their CVs up.'

'I give them more freedom to develop and don't impose a rigid framework. I give extra flexibility, eg give them a policy overview and get them to come up with ideas (with others, I would have to set detailed milestones).'

'I throw up opportunities for them to grab. I give them lots of rope. I push them if necessary - I push them hard and ensure they have high exposure.'

'If people want to get on, I help them. I also talent spot and give opportunities to people.'

'I give additional opportunities and exposure, such as new projects and trips abroad.'

These platforms for developing and progressing key skills were greatly prized by the team member for whom they were provided. It built up confidence, gave variety to day-to-day work, and was therefore both interesting and valuable for such employees.

'[Our manager] does help with that in a way because she does select people and say, actually, do you want to work on this project? And get you involved in different things.'

'That really helps me...asking me how to hold meetings, and do little projects and things like that, and then she'd give me feedback on it.'

In addition, senior managers saw that delegating tasks and making space for onward movement for high fliers provided them with a greater sense of responsibility, stretched staff that may otherwise get overly comfortable and unchallenged, and furthermore supported the managers themselves in their position. As with the managers, some senior managers recognised that often the lack of formal opportunities had to be got around in order to give scope for growth.

'She'll give them additional responsibilities if that is what they are looking for, because then she can concentrate on those who are not such high performers, by delegating responsibilities to the high performers.'

'He is encouraging [his high fliers] to run his meetings for him, to reach up and do work of the other grade so they feel important. He's given them responsibility.'

'There is no 'promotion hierarchy' as such [the company] is not big enough. They all find ways of giving their good people stretch opportunities, such as projects. Sometimes, jobs are expanded for good people.'

However – a word of warning! – even high performing team members were not let loose without a further thought, and many managers highlighted the importance of using a guiding hand in order to keep things on the right track. Letting someone with high potential fail in a public way or damage the business is not a helpful thing to do.

'I won't let them out there if I'm not confident they can be let loose...There isn't much space for mistakes, however, so I have to be careful - I give exposure in a safe environment first.'

Previous research:

This approach was echoed within our previous investigation, with some managers accentuating the benefit of getting team members to rehearse or share new or challenging tasks before carrying them out. Managers who develop others well think about giving people stretching work experiences just as much, if not more, than formal training or skill coaching.¹⁰

From a different perspective, some managers were the drivers behind personal journeys of development for their high fliers, sometimes in the form of personal development plans, but managers made sure that such trajectories were not development for development's sake. Any ideas about stretching an able team member had to be congruent with the interests and aspirations of the individual themselves. Other managers used alternative formal development processes for their high-potential team members, such as high-potential pools, and training for promotions.

'We can put some formal type of training in place...there's one particular individual who I heard was performing exceptionally...So a lot of what we're trying to do at the moment is trying to understand what support he needs in his lab area to allow him to do his job so he can go and take some holidays and feel comfortable and that the job's working correctly.'

¹⁰ Hirsh W, Silverman M, Tamkin P, Jackson C (2004a), *Managers as Developers of Others: Main findings of an IES research study*, Institute for Employment Studies, Paper MP35, p.10

'I think I have about eight people with IDPs, Individual Development Plans, and I will encourage some of those individuals to come and have routine one to ones, which they never do, so I go and call them in when I've got time in my schedule to have a chat about their career and about their feelings etc.'

'One of my managers is in the high-performing pool, and I have a number of other people who are showing the signs of being, early career high-potential pool, so are coming towards that. Obviously I can use and do use some of the company systems that we have around us for getting them recognition through, into the early career high-potential pool and the leadership high-potential pool, which then unlocks some of the company benefits for personal development.'

'We look at developing them into the next role within [the company]...We try and give them development needs that look at the next level...So when they're ready to go for the next interview for the next level up, they've got that under their belt, and when the decision is to be made whether which two people get it, the one that's really made the effort on the pre-development into the role stands a better chance...it's the personal commitment they've made to that.'

For team members who had been through this type of well-constructed development, there was a sense of having achieved more than they would have otherwise done, and there was a further feeling that this would not have occurred without the efforts of their managers. Not only did it provide professional amelioration but also self-conviction.

'Before the restructure I was a team administrator and once the restructure was in place [my manager] said to me, there is a new position for you which you can go and take on and grow into and take on as your own; [it] showed that she had faith in me in the role I was in, in the role that she saw for me in the future.'

'When I was on a developmental secondment, he paid close attention to roles, and put stuff into place to ensure he could get involved. He shows an interest in my PDP, a personal interest.'

Previous research:

Making extra effort in order to provide special opportunities for high fliers was common practice in our previous research. This took the form of utilising existing company structures, or searching for off-the-job experiences such as swaps or secondments, to more subjective approaches such as imparting more information about the company. These opportunities are seen not only as skills-building but also

as enriching CVs and making able individuals more visible to other managers in the business.¹¹

4.1.2 Mentoring

The other, more fluid side of bolstering high fliers comes in the form of mentoring, which frequently took the form of things other than on-the-job opportunities. These were often more subjective support, sometimes in the form of making sure that recognition and appreciation of their work was clearly communicated, or through reassuring encouragement. In alternative cases, team members were sponsored to participate in additional qualifications outside the organisation, others were introduced to senior managers. Linking these cases was a sense of an ongoing personal relationship through which engaging managers could best develop their highest performing team members.

'I make sure they know it. I make sure that they are getting the right opportunities. So for example, I have two people working for me now, one directly and one indirectly, who are clearly very talented...I've made sure that I've sat down with them, that I know what's on their development plans, and I'm helping them have access to things like, I've helped both of them find the right mentor, for example.'

'Whilst this person was really knowledgeable, she lacked a bit of confidence. So in public meetings she would be a bit passive. So what I did there was in our one to one I was saying to her how good she was, her performance, she was doing a great job, how did she feel working with me...We had a chat about skills that you can use in that, and in the last couple of weeks, they had a service report back that this person accompanied her to quite a high-profile meeting within the organisation and how impressed she was at her public speaking. It was confidence, it was nothing more.'

'I think I try and go out of my way to help them promote their career. Some examples: one guy who works for me, I arranged for him to go to dinner with me and his boss to talk about his development, yeah. One other guy, who's high potential, agreed to give him greater visibility for his work. I think invest in time, as well, with them.'

'At present I'm mentoring to a guy who is a [role name], he's doing an HND course, which I've sponsored him on...I've moved him out of operations into [a new] role and developed him...because I see him as a future planner.'

¹¹ Hirsh W, Silverman M, Tamkin P, Jackson C (2004a), *Managers as Developers of Others: Main findings of an IES research study*, Institute for Employment Studies, Paper MP35, p.10
Hirsch W, Silverman M, Tamkin P, Jackson C (2004), *Managers as Developers of Others*, Institute for Employment Studies, Report No. 407, p.19

'I've raised up the guy who's at the senior level now too, I think, he's enjoying his role more. He's also working at a level which is now very senior...I think he just needed an arm around his shoulder that says that you can do this.'

From the perspectives of team members, having close interactions with their boss also meant being able to glean extra skills or new ways of approaching tasks, which in turn they could replicate in their own work whilst developing their skills.

'So you've got that mentoring too, and sometimes he will say, he will lead the calls, and sometimes it's good to have that. You can sit back and he'll lead the calls and then you can watch him and hopefully pick up points.'

Senior managers highlighted that their engaging managers' mentoring approaches were successful, particularly as they were able to encourage and inspire their teams on a personal level. Increased performance following such interactions was a key benefit noticed by the senior managers, as well as greater commitment and passion following such personal, professional attention.

'He helps them with their development, he brings development needs through to my leadership team, for us to discuss. So, he promotes good performance in terms of communication, promotes good communication and good performance...He can offer development opportunities.'

'He's got somebody else who's a high performer but is a very quiet high performer... He respects that. I've heard a very nice approach, a nice tone when he speaks to her, an appreciation of what she's achieving...That's his style...He adjusts his pitch...which I think makes him a better person to engage with.'

'Essentially he encourages them...it's mainly encouragement, he's not a dictatorial person. He makes it clear that he wants high standards, and he makes it clear that he doesn't like letting people down, and that message gets on. I think his level of commitment rubs off.'

Previous research:

One aspect that set apart the positive development of highly able team members was the importance of line managers having an extra level of awareness. Paying extra attention to those who have great potential meant these employees were quickly recognised and given the opportunities craved for, when others may not have noticed, and the team member left unchallenged. Once such promise had been identified, good development behaviour emerged as being highly targeted, often towards specific promotions, goals or career options which allowed for specific, strategic plans. Shared between our engaging managers, and those interviewed during our previous research, was a sense that it was appropriate to develop high fliers to the best of their potential, even if you may lose them from your department, using the best organisational architecture at your disposal. In both the earlier research and the current study there is a strong career development

component in these behaviours. Development is not just about performing better in the current job. For those with potential to go further or move into other types of work, development is also about career direction and actions to get there.¹²

4.2 Redressing problem areas

Despite initially finding tackling poor performance or problem areas tricky, all our engaging managers now saw this as integral to their role. Whether the obstacles come in the form of individuals or teams, managers expressed the importance of fairness, collaboration and clarity, but equally emphasised that formal disciplinary procedures must not be shied away from. Whether under formal or informal processes, the approach to redressing problems clustered around three practices: clearly explaining the problem, working collaboratively towards a solution, and acting quickly when trouble emerges.

4.2.1 Clearly explaining the problem

Clarity of interchange is essential when dealing with difficult situations, and often means that things can be redressed without over-emphasised negativity. Managers described themselves in roles similar to translators, diplomats and facilitators; their first approach was one of finding paths to improvement, with responsibility and autonomy still the premise of the team member. It was frequently emphasised that it was highly important not to become immediately aggressive nor overact. Communication was thought to be the best first step, but that was highlighted in tandem with the import of not being afraid to take the next, more formal step if necessary.

'We sit down and have the conversation of where they are at, where they need to be and what is stopping them from getting there, what they can do, what we can do or any barriers that are in the way of them achieving.'

¹² Hirsh W, Silverman M, Tamkin P, Jackson C (2004a), *Managers as Developers of Others: Main findings of an IES research study*, Institute for Employment Studies, Paper MP35, pp. 3, 4, 5

‘There’s a guy...it’s not just the fact he’s not performing in the right manner, but also there’s a little bit of friction between him and his direct report. And the way we try and deal with that is through coaching them, communicate about this...We’ll have them in, we talk to them, we try and listen, well, I try and listen to what their problems and issues are; we talk to the other guy involved in it; and you act as a kind of diplomat between the oil in the cogs.’

‘When I’ve had to do, you know, arranged session with the individuals and said, your performance is not where it should be, had that quite hard conversation with them and say, you need to do better, otherwise there will be consequences in your year-end appraisal, and normally that’s enough to give them a bit of a shake up, but then follow that up with either weekly reviews, or just when they do improve, actually recognise that improvement by having a conversation with them and saying, okay, yes, we were in a particular position, but now I can see that there is improvement.’

Team members strongly welcomed being spoken to honestly, and being given a chance to communicate why things might have fallen below what was expected. Likewise, they also did not want to be left alone to continue if things were not as they should be, and recognised that sometimes formal processes were pertinent.

‘Sometimes, obviously, you’ve got to be able to address poor performance and do some of those things, whereas, at the same time, making sure that you do support people in what they do and make that mean something a bit more. It’s easy to say work within a performance management framework, but to actually sit there and have an idea of what it is you’re doing and what it is you’re trying to achieve and then to pass that on, that’s really important, I think.’

4.2.2 Collaborative redress

Our engaging managers frequently highlighted the importance of remaining neutral and giving the benefit of the doubt when they first heard about difficult situations. Additionally, they went into each of those first discussions with the goal of finding a common, co-operative way of fixing whatever was wrong. Much of the time this approach was able to diffuse tricky situations effectively.

‘We engage first, to try and get the view of the individual, to see whether we’ve misjudged it...we engage to make sure we’re not doing something that is generating this behaviour.’

‘What I’ve found is, a lot of the time people have blind spots and they don’t know...There’s no point giving people a problem without committing to work towards a solution.’

'I've got no problem with people performing as they shouldn't, as long as I can talk to them and they can give me a good reason or I can set them out a plan to try and improve that performance.'

Taking this approach paid off with many team members, who not only worked to improve their work, but also enjoyed having a part in the solution rather than being given directives at arm's length.

'She'll sit down with you and go over where you've gone wrong...and then help you [and] give you instruction and direction.'

'[They'll say] I want you to improve your performance, so do A, B, and C, but she says things like, I was speaking to so and so the other day and are you sure you explained that to them, or have you thought about doing this? So it's like that and it's not, you know, there's a big gap here I want you to address, but it's that sort of hint, and you very quickly...or it's more, sort of remedial.'

4.2.3 Acting quickly

The final crucial strand in tackling difficult areas was to instigate timely responses, and not leaving things to fester or become unmanageable. This often involved being constantly aware so that issues became quickly apparent.

'I tackle things straight away. I explain why things aren't right and work with people to make it better.'

'I don't tolerate people slacking off, not doing their job to the best of their ability. So, I'm always pushing and striving...because we are a strong team and I think the team knows that, it spurs them on, because people don't really want to get left behind.'

'I have more regular meetings, setting clear timeframes. I break things down into small steps and monitor very closely. If this still doesn't work, I might try them out in different work areas and tailor work to them.'

However, it must be highlighted that although our engaging managers felt they had accomplished this well, it had not always been the case and was sometimes seen as an area of improvement by senior managers. This puts a spotlight on an area which is seen as a pivotal point of attention for the sustainable and successful development of teams by their managers.

'It's just the way she approaches things, as if she has confidence in your ability. She'll tell you if you're not on track, and I like that as well, so she doesn't let you go gaily down the road, off on the wrong track.'

Previous research:

As with developing high fliers, our previous research highlighted the importance of having clear and concise delineation of problem areas, as such targeted approaches made redress less complicated. Linking back to some of the earlier behaviours of engaging managers, being close to both work and the team gives managers a much better chance of picking up problems very quickly and having the kinds of relationships in place so that they can be discussed immediately. Aloof managers who do not know their people well are much more likely to pick up issues late and then wait until a formal review to raise any concerns. This is not an effective way of dealing with problems.¹³

¹³ Hirsh W, Silverman M, Tamkin P, Jackson C (2004a), *Managers as Developers of Others: Main findings of an IES research study*, Institute for Employment Studies, Paper MP35, p.4

5 Top Tips

*'Managers who are good at developing their employees try to place them in situations that challenge them and that will lead to improvement. They help employees identify strengths and weaknesses, and compel them to plan about how to improve their weaknesses and develop their strengths. The best developers invest fully in their employees' success. They give accurate feedback and help people overcome their barriers.'*¹⁴

5.1 Practical advice to take forward

This report has focused on how engaging managers successfully develop others. Through our interviews and focus groups, the expertise of managers and experiences of teams provided us with a wealth of information from which to draw conclusions. The following advice is drawn directly from their words, and forms a set of tips to refer to when looking to help teams develop and flourish.

- **Developing individuals and teams is an important component of engaging them.** Managers who engage their people clearly see developing them as a central part of their role as a manager. This role provides direct business benefit (as work is done better), direct benefit and satisfaction for the employee, and their wider engagement at work.
- **Set clear targets:** This allows for a clear visualisation of work goals and where team members want to progress to, and lays out the development path to follow. Additionally, it will allow performance to be based on concrete results, and clarity of expectations can be an effective motivator.

¹⁴ Zwell M (1998), *What Kind of Sales Manager are You?*, Sales and Marketing Management, February

- **But do not rely on targets alone for setting direction:** There will also be occasions in which more fluid mentoring and coaching will be a more appropriate way for team members to progress.
- **Find ways to provide developmental work opportunities within the organisation:** Cross-departmental work can broaden experience and expertise, whilst delegating can increase responsibility, and involving team members in high-profile projects can be a positive challenge.
- **Where appropriate, look for relevant external programmes and courses:** These can range from improving the daily requirements such as feedback techniques, performance management or coaching, to formal higher education courses.
- **Sustain regular contact with team members:** This often requires concerted planning, but is invaluable for staying abreast of any issues, and welcomed by team members who find it improves their personal development.
- **Make sure communication is maintained:** Engaging managers make sure that all feedback and organisational change is quickly and clearly passed on to team members, which assists in creating both trust, and a fast-paced response to problems that may arise.
- **Evaluate performance:** It was shown to be more worthwhile if, rather than waiting until six-monthly or yearly reviews allowed formalised goals and projects to be reviewed, managers also gave day-to-day feedback on performance.
- **Strike a balance between being involved and letting-be:** A manager that rolls up his or her sleeves and gets stuck-in is very appreciated, but it is imperative to not be so involved as to micro-manage.
- **Be visible:** Reducing the distance between you and your teams can lead to higher motivation and higher energy levels.
- **Be flexible and open with opportunities and ideas:** A common theme between our engaging managers was that they were flexible with regard to providing new opportunities for their teams. Managers created safe environments in which employees could develop their own ideas.
- **Recognise and praise:** It was shown to be very important to praise work that was well done, and team members saw this recognition as an expression of their managers being conscientious and equitable people.
- **Spend time getting to know your team members on a personal level:** Creating a positive climate was greatly assisted by putting in effort to get to know team members. Not only does this create good rapport, but it is invaluable in finding out what makes people 'tick', and also identifying different learning styles.

- **Providing special opportunities for high fliers is key for developing and progressing team members:** Additional opportunities and exposures helped to make work very interesting and valuable for highly skilled employees and those with potential.
- **When problems arise, approach them clearly and calmly:** Our engaging managers spent much time learning how to tackle difficult issues. It was frequently emphasised that one of the most important things was not to immediately overreact in the face of adversity; sitting down and talking through the problem often proved to be the best approach.
- **Work with team members to solve problems:** Collaboration was a further key tactic in redressing problem areas, and was often very successful in getting team members back on track.
- **Do not leave problems to get worse:** Tackling issues as soon as they arise is crucial, as it ensures that things do not deteriorate any more than needs be.

Appendix: The Research

Participants in the Engaging Manager research

Seven organisations took part in the research:

1. Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)
2. Centrica
3. Corus
4. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)
5. London Borough of Merton
6. Rolls-Royce
7. Sainsbury's.

In total 25 'engaging managers', 22 senior managers (those who managed the engaging managers) and 154 team members (in 25 teams) took part in the research. We would like to extend our thanks to them for their co-operation, time and enthusiasm.

Methodology

We asked each organisation to identify a small number of engaging managers on the basis of the engagement scores of their teams in their most recent employee attitude survey. We then carried out interviews with both the engaging managers and their own managers, whom we have termed 'senior managers'. We also facilitated 25 focus groups with the 'engaged teams' (one for each engaging manager), containing 154 people in total. Focus group members completed the standard IES engagement questionnaire and participated in a discussion. The focus groups also included a period of time for team members to consider their

manager and describe them by means of descriptive words, a drawing, or a metaphor.

Further details on the methodology adopted can be found in our first report on the research.¹⁵

Terminology

When designing the questionnaire and discussion guides for this research, and later when planning the report structure, we considered whether to use the term 'manager' or 'leader'. The term 'leader' is now used in many contexts where 'manager' might have been used in the past, and there is a continuing debate about the difference between what a manager is and does, compared to the role of a leader. We decided, however, to opt for the terms 'manager' and 'senior manager' because we found that in the majority of our participating organisations, the term 'leader' was either not used at all, or was used only for very senior positions (such as the Chief Executive). In only one of the seven participating organisations was there routine reference to 'leaders', 'leadership skills', 'leadership training and development', etc.

Research funding

All of our research into employee engagement, including the Engaging Manager research reported here, has been funded by IES's membership HR Network. For more details on IES's HR Network, please visit www.employment-studies.co.uk.

Taking the research further

The Engaging Manager research is being used to develop a 360° assessment tool focusing on engaging/disengaging managerial behaviours.

¹⁵ Robinson D, Hayday S (2009), *The Engaging Manager*, Institute for Employment Studies, Report No. 470

THE ENGAGING MANAGER SERIES

The engaging manager in development mode

Rosa Marvell, Dilys Robinson, Wendy Hirsh

This report is part of *The Engaging Manager Series*, which is a follow-up to IES report 470, *The Engaging Manager*. The other publications in this series include:

- **Images of Engaging Management**
- **The Engaging Manager and sticky situations**
- **Teams and the Engaging Manager**

Each short report in the *Engaging Manager Series* explores different aspects of engaging management. This report explores the engaging manager as a developer, drawing on in-depth discussions with the managers themselves, their own managers, and their teams. We also draw on findings from our earlier research into *Managers as Developers of Others*.

Engaging managers have had very different experiences of formal personal development, ranging from practically none to considerable investment in internal and external leadership programmes. However, they all have a development focus when it comes to managing their teams. Typically, they manage performance very well, and in doing so understand the different development needs of individuals within the team. They adopt a coaching style, and will look for opportunities for team members, or the team as a whole, to shine. This might be an opportunity to gain a place on a talent programme, or become involved in a special project or secondment, or simply to try out something different. The report gives some practical advice to managers who would like to improve their development focus.

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